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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3435

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SOFIA 000377

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DEPT FOR EUR/NCE, EUR/PRA - MAZEVEDO, EUR/PPD - TCORN,
VCI/MDSP - STEVEN ROSENKRANTZ, AND NSC - MAHAYWARD.

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/21/2017

TAGS: PREL PGOV MARR KPAO PL EZ RU BU

SUBJECT: BULGARIA: MISSILE DEFENSE PD STRATEGY

REF: A. STATE 30480

1B. STATE 26910

Classified By: DCM Alexander Karagiannis, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) Per Ref A request, Post has designated DCM Alexander Karagiannis as the POC for public diplomacy and outreach efforts on missile defense.

12. (U) During the Sofia visit of Admiral Harry Ulrich, CINCUSNAVEUR, the Admiral briefed the Sofia and Varna press corps in appearances on February 22, 2007. Local media concerns centered on the implications of the proposed MD system for Bulgaria, including the possibility of locating system elements on Bulgarian territory. The Admiral's comments made clear that such stationing would be a political decision, but that the "U.S. intention is to provide such protection to all its friends and allies, as much as possible."

13. (U) The DCM spoke about missile defense at a March 13, 2007 town hall meeting in Kotel, a town located near Novo Selo, the site of a Bulgarian-American joint training facility. Using Ref B talking points, the DCM underscored that the joint facilities will make both Bulgaria and America more secure.

Comment:

14. (C) Bulgarian politicians and public do not currently view missile defense as a significant concern. The issue periodically spikes in the media, but it is a fringe topic, usually generated by press stories abroad and sustained (briefly) by herd-mentality reporting. Its half-life is generally short, though the xenophobic, anti-U.S. (and probably Moscow oriented) Ataka party tries to beat this drum.

15. (C) We believe that raising the MD profile through an intensive PD campaign could spur unhelpful press speculation, which will in turn feed the worst of pro-Russia interests here. "U.S.-Russian tensions" would become the story undermining progress on joint basing facilities, and reviving now-dormant public concerns that the U.S.-Bulgarian security relationship will squeeze Bulgaria between U.S. and Russian interests. We propose a targeted, primarily demand-driven MD outreach strategy aimed at puncturing unfounded concerns, while emphasizing the importance of our MD plans to European and trans-Atlantic security.

BEYRLE